

In their 1975 jazz funk classic 'Rock Creek Park' *The Blackbyrds* were showing off about 'doing it in the park' and 'doing it after dark.' It's a boast Charlton Athletic Community Trust can now lay claim to...

# Diamond Lights

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## ADAM'S STORY

"I was one of these kids. I left school at a young age with no qualifications and wasn't heading in the best direction. Charlton took me under their wing and gave me a chance to get sports leadership training and my level one coaching badge. Now I'm studying for my level two coaching and learning to drive to help me go as far in coaching as I can. I'm only 19, not that much older than some of the lads I coach, but it's not a problem. I think they see what I've achieved and think that they could be doing something similar later in life."

In Gravesend 30 kids are loitering in a green oasis set in the concrete jungle of the surrounding estate. To the untrained eye these teenagers are an ASBO waiting to happen. But they're not here to drink cider and intimidate the elderly, they're patiently waiting for Charlton Athletic Community Trust to unpack their gear and start the midweek coaching session.

Football in the Community schemes are hardly a new phenomenon. Most league clubs have been travelling to their constituents and running programs in the summer for years. The difference here is that this is deep midwinter and, despite it being cold, wet and very dark, the show can still go on.

Normally to train at this time of year kids need to decamp to the sort of state of the art facility that are the reserve of the cream of the local footballing crop. But tonight CACT coaches Andy, Cam and Adam have brought cones, balls, bibs and the most important weapon in their arsenal - portable floodlights. And all packed into the back of a 4x4. Minutes later a pitch has been marked out and a set of eight lights illuminate a playing area of 60m by 40m and it's game time.



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Local resident and queen of the neighbourhood watch Dawn Palmer thinks the scheme and the lights are a godsend. "Residents were complaining about the kids just hanging around so I started three football teams to give them something to do. But we could only do it in the summer. Now Charlton are involved we can keep them busy all year round."

As rare as this scene is, it needn't be. Paul Stevens from Portable Floodlights explains, "There's a shortage of floodlit facilities in the UK compared to other Western European countries. Schools and clubs are limited in what they can do in the winter. Even if they're fortunate to have the funds to apply for fixed lighting they have a major issue getting planning permission. The idea was to design something that could help overcome that."

The result is a package you can take into remote areas or difficult communities and make football accessible to as many people as possible. And at a fraction of the price and effort of fixed floodlighting. The set up before us would set you back £4,000, whereas fixed floodlighting to cover the same area costs closer to £30,000.

And you don't need to have deep pockets or be affiliated with a professional club to do the same in your area. The FA introduced a system through the Build The Game Fund where schools, clubs and community projects can request funding for up to 90 per cent of the cost of the lights to a maximum of £20,000 with additional grants available from The Football Foundation. Applications are welcome from Local Authorities, all educational establishments, football clubs, unincorporated not for profit organisations and charities. To qualify for funding you need to demonstrate you're creating an opportunity for more people to play. It really is that easy to bring a bit of light to the kids in your community. Try it, it'll make all the difference in the world.

**For more information on the Build The Game Fund or how floodlights can help your project visit [www.portablefloodlights.com](http://www.portablefloodlights.com)**

